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Authors	Hutchinson, Jo
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Partnership, capital formation and equality and diversity: learning from five case studies

Jo Hutchinson

Abstract

Careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) should challenge stereotypes, promote equality of opportunity and celebrate diversity (DCSF, 2008). Its delivery requires a range of people, organisations and services that work together to focus on individual needs. The co-ordination of these multiple agencies is referred to in this paper as partnership working. Together, these elements of firstly careers work, secondly equality and diversity, and thirdly partnership working form the substance of this chapter.

In the spring of 2010 the International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) with the National Institute for Social and Economic Research (NIESR) conducted fieldwork among case study projects. They were identified by the sector as representing examples of good and innovative practice that focussed on the range of equality and diversity issues in the delivery of CEIAG to young people. This was part of a project commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC, 2011). These case studies were chosen to reflect the various equality strands, covering England, Scotland and Wales and were not necessarily CEIAG projects, rather they recognise that careers work is a part of young people's overall needs and thus CEIAG becomes part of the overall intervention strategy.

Using these case studies the paper explores the idea that effective working has to be based on the creation or utilisation of aspects of local capital (Putnam, 2000; Kintrea et al, 2008); namely political, financial, organisational and social capital. The case studies all demonstrated that a range of conditional factors needed to be in place for projects to develop and thrive. The paper introduces the various well-rehearsed factors which shape effective partnership working (Hutchinson and Campbell, 1998; Learning and Skills Council, 2003; Ford, 2005; LSIS, 2009) before going on to observe some of the processes that the case studies demonstrated in terms of transformational behaviours, personalisation and challenge. It concludes that the concept of capital formation with its focus on connections, reciprocity and trust helps to illuminate some of the motivators and drivers of partnership working.

Conditions for effective partnership working

There are a number of resources available that explain how multi-sector or multi-agency partnerships can work effectively either within an organisation (such as within children and youth services in a local authority) or between organisations (a multi-agency neighbourhood team for example). The essential features of good practice in partnership working have been rehearsed elsewhere (see Thorlby and Hutchinson, 2002; LSIS, 2009) and can briefly be summarised here as relating to the following areas:

- * Strategic links at both executive or political levels, and operational levels
- * Good regular communication
- * Effective referral systems and management information systems
- * Supported transitions
- * Mutual awareness raising through formal CPD and informal meetings

A guide specifically relating to Connexions and IAG Partnerships (Learning and Skills Council, 2003) set out the principles of joint working: clear strategic planning; effective referral systems; supported transition, and effective support for people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It also highlighted the practical importance of a range of factors including strategic links, good communications, quality development, referrals, joint training and so forth.

Whilst this document, and others, offer clear and evidence-based information to support effective practice, they pay limited attention to the drivers of partnership development and multi-agency delivery. One reason for this may be that partnership working is a statutory requirement or obligation for many activities. For example Connexions partnerships were required as part of their licence to have partnership boards overseeing their management and delivery. Similarly Section 139 of the Education and Skills Act, 2008 required schools to work with a range of other services, including careers services, to produce a written report on the further learning needs for pupils who are statemented and non-statemented with a disability. There are however gaps in services where the requirements of statutory duties of provision are more opaque and where provision is neither monitored nor reported within a performance framework. Some equality and diversity services are located in this context. For example the legislative requirements to support young people with learning difficulties and disabilities in their transitions through school are clear. By contrast the extent to

which schools are required to actively challenge stereotypical choices or support young people with particular religious or belief systems lacks clarity. It is here where the conditions for effective service development through partnership working are worthy of exploration.

The concept of capital is a useful way to think about social conditions and how the combined impact of people, organisations, and resources working together can effect change. Social capital is described by Putnam (2000:19) as follows:

Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.

These social networks can take many forms including the family, friendships, networks of work colleagues or peers and professionals. The concept of social capital has been applied to civic society (Putnam, 2000), and to young people's transitions in deprived communities (Kintrea et al, 2008). In this chapter we consider social capital as networks of people willing to engage in effecting change. Political capital is either a sub-component of social capital (with political parties or movements being the institutionalised expression of socially generated allegiances), or a distinct phenomenon. Lopez (2002) identifies political capital as a distinct idea comprising reputational capital (built through inspiring popularity), and representative capital (granted as democratic legitimacy). The actions of individual politicians can be explained as entrepreneurial investment in political capital voting. In this case we have chosen to highlight political capital in the sense of agenda setting, and political leadership. Finally there is organisational capital, which encompasses aspects of leadership, skills and professional resources and managerial capacity. In this sense organisational capital also includes financial capital as most of the case study interventions applied minimal capital investment, but significant investment of skills and time.

The case studies are used to demonstrate how the accumulation of capital either at a very small local level or as part of a city-wide process contributes to the development of partnership approaches to individual projects or to modes of mainstream service delivery.

The case studies

Case Study Project	Project summary
HCS Ltd: Stop Gap (Hertfordshire): Young people with Learning Difficulty and Disabilities (LDD).	A programme to support young people (notably those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders) with a bridge to mainstream learning post16 to maintain engagement with learning or employment.
Derby City Council: Interagency Strategy for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller youth.	A network of interested professionals from a range of partner agencies including the Council, Connexions, Schools, Primary Care Trust, Police and voluntary sector that meet to share information, development project ideas and joint actions.
PSC Training & Development Ltd: Widening Choices (Plymouth), to address gender stereotyping.	Programmes of engagement linking with schools to build IAG, employer visits and other tasters to raise awareness and participation of under-represented groups.
Connect South West: 2BU for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) young people and Individual Support Advisers (ISAs) for those with Learning Difficulty and Disabilities	2BU is a young person managed network of LGBT young people run through Connexions with links with other support agencies. Individual Support Advisers work as part of multi-agency teams to establish the most appropriate progression routes for young people including working in their own social enterprise.
Glasgow City Council: Young Parents Project	Key workers assigned to young parents to develop personal action plans, broker opportunities and advocate their needs to support them through early parenthood and into learning or employment.

The case studies were chosen through a process of consultation and nomination to reflect the EHRC equality strands namely age, disability, gender, race, religion and belief, sexual orientation, and transgender. Five of the eight case studies presented in the report (EHRC, 2011) are used in the paper to reflect widespread information, advice and guidance (IAG) practice.

Conditions for establishing partnership initiatives

The case studies represent a broad range of activities that place the needs of young people from across the equality strands at their centre. They are not all careers education or IAG projects nor are they necessarily led by careers service providers but they nevertheless offer good examples of the ways in which their IAG needs are addressed. Their development has been based on the accumulation of political, social and organisational capital in their respective areas. These concepts are illustrated in the section below before returning to how such capital relates to effective partnership working.

Political capital

The first of these is associated with political will and policy imperatives. Some case projects have been generated as a consequence of national policy change: an example is Stop Gap which was initially a pilot project for the Department of Health (2001) 'Valuing People' agenda. In others the locality has experienced a range of factors that bring the alignment of political will and policy imperatives. The example of Derby's equality network is instructional here. A strong political will within the local authority ensured that high priority was placed on equality and diversity when setting up the Children's Services directorate. This was achieved through the establishment of a committee comprising senior directors and officers to scrutinise activity from across the five Every Child Matters groups from an equality and diversity perspective. Their task was enhanced and supported by investment in equality and diversity officers within the connexions service and the local authority.

Alongside political will, leadership is a key element of political capital that can be invested in equality and diversity initiatives to support effective career learning and career guidance. In some cases these are leaders working within democratic structures; in Derby the role that the Director of Children's Services played has been significant. The incumbent at the time of the development of the network had been very clear about the importance of equality and diversity issues and has given both symbolic and practical support to the promotion of services and good practices across the city's services for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities.

Finally in the context of evidence based practice, research based intelligence can help support policy agendas. For example, the Young Parents project accumulated evidence from various robust sources to demonstrate that Glasgow has relatively high levels of teenage pregnancy, with about 20% of the 4000 Scottish teenage births each year. They made the case that the current system could mean that a young mother reaches the age of 28 with no qualifications or work experience before she tries to enter the labour market. This evidence meant that the partners could bring a powerful case to the Working for Families Fund and brought key stakeholders together behind a project which has been very successful in supporting young parents into the labour market.

The profile of careers work is rarely an election maker or breaker (career was not mentioned in the Liberal Democrat 2010 manifesto for example). Political capital may not accumulate around career, but careers professionals have nonetheless built creative responses to those issues that do generate it. Thus

much IAG work among equality groups occurs under the aegis of a range of alternative policy agendas including:

- Stop Gap which was developed as a pilot research project in response to a Department of Health white paper 'Valuing People'. This noted the discrimination faced by individuals with learning difficulties and disabilities and the need to provide an increased offer of suitable provision for this group of young people as the move from mainstream pre 16 to full time post 16 provision.
- The Young Parents Project in Glasgow, which is set within the interlocking policy agendas to reduce Child Poverty and enhance Employability, is focussed around the city's regeneration areas and works closely with the City Council, Jobcentre Plus and Skills Development Scotland.

The accumulation of political capital therefore brings together three key partners; political leaders who wish to build their careers and profiles by identifying issues of significant concern to the electorate; researchers and policy makers whose concern is to ensure strategy and policy are developed that are grounded and appropriate; and professionals in whose interest effective practice needs to be promoted through policy makers to political leaders to ensure their work can continue to be supported.

Organisational capital

The accumulation of financial and organisational capital is the second factor that has created an environment in which these case study activities have developed. One example is the way in which an organisation can structure its work to focus on equality and diversity issues. This is the case with the organisation Connect South West which states in their company brochure that 'equality and diversity is at the heart of our aim to provide excellent universal services to all those with whom we work'. They stated that their logo and rainbow colour scheme was deliberately selected to emphasise inclusivity. They have Development Managers whose role is to ensure that services are developed that meet the needs of particular groups of young people such as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT), and Learning Difficulty and Disability (LDD) provision, that were highlighted within the case study work.

In Derby, that infrastructure takes the form of a network of agencies that have built the Interagency Strategy for Roma Communities. This has led to the

development of a network of interested professionals from a range of partner agencies including the Council, Connexions, schools, Primary Care Trust, police and voluntary sector. The agenda of the network is fluid and responsive to emerging concerns and issues. It can represent the work of the various partners, exchange information and provide a conduit for policy issues from the GRT community to senior executive management.

The case studies also show how building infrastructure between partners can provide a sound basis for personalised service delivery. In Glasgow for example, the Young Parents Project has developed very effective links at operational levels between health and social care, training providers, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and Jobcentre Plus. The project's key workers (who are IAG professionals) receive referrals mainly from SDS, but also from other agencies and they negotiate access to opportunities, provide support in sorting out childcare and benefits and maintain contact with the young parent throughout. The model is one of effective co-working and co-referral with partner agencies. Young people are not referred (baton-like) from one agency to another; rather, those agencies bring their support around the young person. Key workers are a valued part of that support network, being invited to participate in case review meetings, for example, when there is an issue of social care. These operational partnerships work well because there is a high degree of knowledge about the project and trust between colleagues (for example, some of the key workers have worked in partner organisations prior to their current role – and indeed some key partners have been key workers). According to one partner, the advisers as 'individuals are exceptionally able and knowledgeable'. In this example the development of social capital mutually reinforces the development of infrastructural capital.

A similar example is of the person-centred transition review which is part of the effective practice nominated by Connect South West in its work with young people with LDD. They employ a number of Individual Support Advisers (ISAs) to meet the needs of LDD young people. These ISAs have individual caseloads of up to 120. By contrast, mainstream advisers may have individual caseloads exceeding 480. The ISA caseload enables more in-depth work to be undertaken, over longer periods, and with far greater involvement than in the mainstream with young people, parents, staff and other stakeholders including those in Local Sector Colleges, specialist colleges, Adult Services, 16-19 Local Authority Commissioning Team and others (including medical and educational specialists) within Children's Services. Since 2008, ISAs have been involved in supporting

person-centred reviews. These differ from standard practice because they are centred on the young person, indeed in the early stages of the process young people are asked where they would like the review to take place and who should be there. ISAs are able to offer their perspective on some of the positive and affirmative questions that structure the review, such as what is important for each young person now and in the future. These interventions take place in an environment which values professional support within an infrastructure that can accommodate a range of partner inputs. They work together to establish the most appropriate progression routes in order to develop the Section 139 agreements that provides the information required to enable the young person to progress from school into education and training.

In these case studies organisation capital has been built through the development and maintenance of networks of professionals working within their own organisations and across others to build a complex web of professional knowledge and co-operative working that exists at both strategic and operational levels. Partnership working focuses activity on the needs of particular individuals or groups. In turn the process of co-delivery fosters network building, knowledge sharing and new ways of working that serve to reinforce organisational capital. The partners here are professionals at all levels of organisations, all focussed on the support needs of young people.

Social capital

Building relationships that go on to underpin working in partnership is a key theme that links all the work described by the case study projects in their promotion of information, advice and guidance to address equality and diversity issues. Projects all have effective relationships with the young people with whom they work. In some cases young people have influence over the development of the future direction of the project.

Connect South West hosts the 2BU project which began in 2003 as a youth group for 'gay lads' in Wells, supported by a Connexions Personal Adviser. Its aim is to help those who attend 'to become comfortable with their sexuality and gain confidence from others like them as well as being able to seek advice and guidance around issues relevant to their situation'. The 2BU group has a membership of between 30 to 50 young people. The majority of the group are male and aged 14-18 but mixed in terms of their interests and abilities. About 12 to 18 members meet each week. The programme usually includes: fun activities; guests/speakers (including staff from Connexions and other advice services on matters such as eating disorders and sexual health); and, importantly,

opportunities for discussions around areas of common interest (for example, sharing experiences of 'coming out'). Since it began, the group has extended to include lesbian, bisexual and transgender young people. In 2007 there were several groups around Somerset, however the young people involved decided that they wished to extend their social networks beyond their immediate locality and agreed that one group would be preferable. With support from Somerset's Youth Opportunity Fund the groups came together. Part of the funding covers transport costs so that young people can meet from various parts of the county.

The focus of the Widening Choices project has been to broker relationships with employers and employer groups to raise awareness of some 400 learners of vocational options in jobs where particular groups are under-represented. It is run by PSC Training and Development Limited which is one of the largest independent training providers in the South West. The project aims to help young people to think "outside the box in terms of their career aspirations, and to raise awareness of the opportunities open to them. For example, it targets females in construction and engineering and males in hair and beauty, care and retail. The project has recruited fifteen Ambassadors that represent a range of occupations including administration, engineering, hairdressing, construction trades, motor vehicle, health and social care and retail. Ambassadors have to undertake training on equality and diversity and are then encouraged to host visits by Widening Choices learners, to participate in the projects' steering group, and undertake school visits. It was reported by a tutor that young people who participated had benefited. 'It had opened up their minds to new possibilities and gave them a range of insights'. Employers meanwhile report that they are interested in recruiting from non-traditional backgrounds, for example garages are reported to be keen to take on female motor engineers because their customers would appreciate it.

Social capital, arising from the interactions between young people with a common experience, or between employers with a shared outlook or business need, have provided the foundations upon which the case study projects and interventions have been built. The partnerships are between individuals or groups of people whose social bonds provide the currency of social capital.

Effective partnerships and the drivers of capital construction.

The case studies illustrate how capital accumulation in terms of political, social and organisational infrastructure has been applied to support young people from a range of equality and diversity groups to access information, advice and

guidance to support their life transitions. It has also identified the range of partner relationships that exist within each. This chapter will now turn to consider the added advantage of thinking about partnership working in the context of capital formation. Namely that it offers an insight into the motivations and drivers of those who engage in the partnership process.

Partnership formation, organisation and delivery is often seen as a business strategy (Andrews et al, 2009). It is viewed as something that arises out of a rational and considered examination of alternative options to achieve a pre-defined and clearly articulated objective. In this way the creation of a partnership is conceived as two organisations engaged in developing working arrangements, following decisions taken at a strategic level. This mode of partnership formation will have resonance with many organisations. However the drivers are more complex than this rational approach suggests, and the concept of capital helps to illustrate this.

Firstly, capital accumulation does not need a strategy. With social capital, for example, a single worker (the Connexions personal adviser in the 2BU project for example) can use their social friendships to build an activity that eventually becomes an entity that takes it beyond a relatively informal social network to a project with a worker, funding, infrastructure and formal activities. Capital accumulation in this sense can be organic and driven by social formations and a shared interest.

Secondly, capital accumulation can be built through informal communications. It can emerge from the interactions between professionals and co-workers having shared contacts and clients, getting to know how each other works and their relative strengths. This was a feature of the Glasgow young parents' project where the project workers knew many of their counterparts and associates in organisations from around the city. Informal communication between workers can build organisational capital that succeeds in supporting young people almost in spite of organisational procedures rather than because of them.

Thirdly capital can be rapidly accumulated and rapidly lost. A change in political leadership can lead to a raised or a reduced profile for careers engagement work for example or for work with particular equality and diversity groups. Capital can be seen as a transient and intangible commodity.

Finally, capital attracts other capital. There is a sometimes an element of synergy where the creation of professional networks attracts organisational capacity to build a project which then attracts political interest. Widening Choices and the work of the training organisation and its partners both responded to, and

helped to shape, regional policy agendas through effective and positive evaluation.

Conclusions

Good practice guides often focus on technical and organisational aspects of partnership, based on empirical observation of businesses and organisations that engage in partnership working. These elements of practice are important and useful to practitioners who are building partner activity. They do however tend to view the drivers towards partnership working as strategic issues (to compete or to collaborate for example), or as a rational response to opportunities arising in the external environment. Observation of a number of case study projects that were delivered in partnership to promote IAG support to equality and diversity groups revealed that while good practice in technical and organisational matters existed, they did not explain the formation of these partnerships. This was particularly interesting as many of them were not necessarily IAG projects, but embedded IAG within a wider context.

The concept of capital formation with its focus on connections, reciprocity and trust helps to illuminate some of the motivators and drivers of partnership working. It recognises that partnership is an integral element to the formation of capital. Furthermore capital (social, political or organisational) can accumulate organically, and can attract other capital, is built through complex networks of social and professional interaction, can build rapidly and equally rapidly lose its currency.

Partnerships that have developed to promote IAG among the range of young people's needs have done so within both challenging and supportive environments. Their key impact has been to achieve transformative practice. For example, the Wider Choices programme was specifically set up to encourage young women to think about taking non-stereotypical vocational choices by facilitating employer visits. 2BU introduced young people to older role models from their own communities to give them a sense of optimism and challenge. The Glasgow Young Parents project used an advocacy approach to improve the knowledge and change attitudes of colleagues working in partner agencies. Those transformations take place when there is alignment of local and national political capital with the agendas of the social networks of professionals and communities working in an area alongside organisational capacity. In particular there needs to be significant local political capital to ensure that appropriate infrastructure, investment and resource were encouraged around activities that

sought to address IAG needs alongside the range of other equality and diversity needs. With the alignment of social, political and infrastructural capacity around a particular issue, partnership working can thrive and transformative practice be observed.

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